

Enfield 2, Wycombe Wanderers 2

LEAGUE LEADERS, Wycombe Wanderers, jealously clung to their four point advantage over major rivals, Enfield, with a story-book second half recovery that left the Isthmian champions on the verge of panicking away both points at Southbury Road on Saturday.

Another five minutes, and it's a good bet, Wycombe would have tucked a second point under their belts. But no one can reasonably claim a draw to be anything other than the only fair result of what had been pre-labelled the most vital match of the season.

As is so often the case, the classical top-of-the-table situation, failed to produce football on a parallel.

Nevertheless, the sheer tenseness of the occasion brought matters to boiling point, as Wanderers pegged back the champions' two goal lead, via opportunist scores from Keith Searle and John Delaney in the last quarter of the match.

Enfield, who had pilfered both points at Loakes Park earlier in the season when they struck twice in the last five minutes, weren't about to risk cutting it so fine again.

And, although Wycombe had their chances, it was Tommy Lawrence's men who went in ahead at the interval.

Barry Baker, still rolling around in the 'doldrums' form-wise, tried a pot-shot from 20 yards after six minutes. But six minutes on, John Connell, the man who quit and returned to Southbury Road within a month, brought John Maskell into play with a short, sharp stab, and seconds later, shot wide of the mark as Wycombe came in for some stern pressure.

Hounded by the sometimes rough attentions of John Payne, Enfield and England's stocky number four, Tony Horseman was finding it hard to run himself into a clear goalscoring position.

But twice, in the 15th and 16th minutes, he had his chance to slip a home defence that has only conceded eight goals in their 13 League games. First Fry, then Les Tilley, intervened when he faced 'keeper Wolstenholme at close quarters.

Two minutes later, a needless foul, in which Ian Rundle downed Ken Gray on the inside edge of Wanderers' area, handed Enfield a golden opportunity to step in front.

Sure enough, Roger Day 'did a Delaney' placing the penalty low and left, while Maskell was set on a wrong course.

Horseman 'dummied' to let a through ball go forward to Searle, for a move that should have levelled the score in the 25th minute. The centre forward was left with only Wolstenholme to beat, but aimed the ball to the right of the net.

Enfield looked all the better for their lead, and five minutes later, Connell's centre was mishandled by Maskell, with only a Delaney clearance to save Wanderers from further deficit.

Striker, Peter Feeley, fumbled a certain chance after Keith Stephenson had failed to return the ball upfield cleanly in the 34th minute, and it took all the acrobatic mastery of Maskell to re-direct a fine shot from Day over the bar, within the next minute.

Far too often, Wycombe's defence allowed Enfield wingers to outflank them, thus gaining time for their fellow-forwards to move through the centre in force, with havoc-like effects.

The floodgates were shut, however, with the introduction of Vince Faulkner as substitute for Stephenson for the second half.

Faulkner's form at Hillingdon the previous Monday, suggested

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such a move may be likely and another 45 minutes of steady defending from the centre-half-cum-centre-forward must have done a power of good to his claim for a regular league place alongside Delaney.

Enfield managed to employ their outflanking tactic once more, in the 54th minute, when Adams worked Day into a perfect position and the right winger made it 2-0.

There and then, Wycombe stopped their retreat; quick, inter-man passing gradually became more than Enfield, including six of Charles Hughes' England Amateur squad, could cope with, and within three minutes, Tilley was forced to sky the ball over his own bar to stop Searle from pulling back the arrears. Five minutes later, Tilley brought down Horseman just outside the 'box', but a Delaney free kick was intercepted by Wolstenholme.

A penetrating through ball from Julian Lailey finally cracked Enfield's weakening shell, 18 minutes from time. Searle persistently shook off one challenge and offset two more defenders plus Wolstenholme before slotting the ball into goal.

Enfield were noticeably rattled by this reverse, and began to look as uneasy as they

had done when outplayed under the Wycombe floodlights in the first meeting.

With seven minutes to go, a handball by Fry 20 yards out, after Horseman had headed down a floated cross from Searle, gave Wanderers a direct free kick.

Rising above the electric tension Delaney fired low and hard through a ruck of players and past an unsighted goalkeeper, for the equaliser, before thrusting a joyful fist of triumph to the Gods.

Well into injury time, Geoff Anthony, a quiet but harrasing worker, on the day, headed the ball down near the line, and, to sum up the nervous state they were in, three Enfield defenders between them almost managed to score an own goal after the ball had been chested off the line.

Perhaps the difference lay in Wanderers' superior team work when it counted most. For at no time did Enfield combine as impressively as their visitors did in that last, ferocious burst of power.

The positions now stay unchanged, with Wanderers claiming the Isthmian top-spot, while Enfield have three games in hand and four points to cancel out.

Enfield: I. Wolstenholme; L. Tilley, P. Fry; J. Payne, P. Betson, J. Adams; R. Day, J. Connell, P. Feeley, K. Gray, R. Hill. Sub.: Oakaby (not used).

Wycombe Wanderers: J. Maskell; I. Rundle, C. Gale; K. Stephenson (sub.: V. Faulkner), J. Delaney, J. Lailey; L. Worley, B. Baker, K. Searle, A. Horseman, G. Anthony.